T/SOR/49/2/10

Job Seekers Allowance

A Green Party Perspective

JSA is the child of the union of Portillo and Lilley; predictably it is not a pretty sight. It represents the Tories' most serious assault yet on the post war consensus that social unrest can be avoided by ensuring basic needs for those excluded from the job market.

Why the JSA? A third of the population is currently claiming some form of benefit. The JSA will force people to choose between taking low paid or undesirable work and losing their benefits. It will lower the average wage and save the government money (doubtless for tax cuts before the next election). **The J.S.A. will come into full force in October 1996...**

What is the JSA? The JSA will replace unemployment benefit and income support and merge Job centres with the DSS.

BENEFIT CUTS

- Unemployment Benefit (which lasted for a year and was paid for through National Insurance contributions) has been replaced by Contributory JSA which lasts for only 6 months. After this, claimants will face means-testing and possible disqualification. There will be no reduction in NI contributions, which have in fact increased by over 50% since 1979.
- 18-24 year olds will suffer a 20% cut on their present unemployment benefit.
- Benefits could be lost for up to 6 months if you voluntarily leave a job, are sacked, refuse a job or fail to make yourself available for work.
- Access to hardship payments will be greatly reduced.
- People with partners who work more than 24 hours per week will not get means-tested JSA.
- Redundancy payments, savings, and even partners' part-time earnings, will be used to reduce or deny benefits.

JOBSEEKERS AGREEMENT

- You will have to make an agreement with the ES (Employment Service) as to how and when you are going to look for work.
- Failure to keep to the agreement (e.g. not applying for a job when told to do so, or not going for an interview), could lead to the loss of JSA for up to six months.
- An ES bonus scheme for staff who deny peoples' benefits is already causing anger. Attacks on ES staff by claimants have increased by 240% since 1993.
- Active signing - You will have to provide evidence of jobsearch activity every time you sign on.

PART-TIME STUDENTS

- Part-time students studying for more than 16 hours of 'guided learning' per week will not be considered to be actively seeking work (a cut from the current 21 hours) and will not therefore get JSA.

TAKE THAT JOB

- You have 13 weeks to find a job within your trade or profession, after which you will be ordered to take up any job offer, irrelevant of pay, conditions, environmental or ethical concerns.

ORDERS FOR JOB SEEKERS

- ES staff can order you to make yourself more presentable (physical appearance, clothing, attitude) and to take part in training courses. Failure to comply will result in the loss of 2 weeks benefit.

A Prison Builders Charter ?
The JSA will save the Government around £600 Million per annum. The same Government admits that 70,000 people currently claiming Income Support or Unemployment Benefit will be totally denied JSA, and a further 180,000 will lose up to 70% in the first year alone. The number of people without jobs, money, land or hope is going to increase fast, as will the crime rate. The government already has plans for 16 new prisons at a cost of £1,320 Million. The JSA is a Charter for private security companies and prison builders. *Robbing the poor to pay the rich.*

Effects on Employment - Wages will fall as people are forced into taking jobs whatever the pay, and worl conditions deteriorate as the cheap labour pool grows. Leaving a job for any reason could make you ineligibl for JSA for up to six months, and financial insecurity will leave people trapped in miserable and useless 'jobs'

Support the Employment Service strikers - Most ES staff oppose the JSA. It will make over half of ther redundant and put the rest in the position of having to cut people's benefit in order to earn more money. Sc far there have been around 40 strikes, which if successful, could scrap the JSA. Supporting these actions wil not affect your benefits.

Incapacity benefit (as of April 1996) - Over 200,000 people will no longer qualify for Incapacity Benefits owing to the stringent new tests by DSS Doctors; yet those too incapacitated to be available for, or actively seeking work, will also fail to qualify for JSA. There is no safety net.

Labour's Response - A Blair government would also demand that claimants fulfill conditions before getting benefits. Under Labour's 'workfare' plans, refusal of more than 3 offers of training courses would lead to 40% cut in benefit. Low wages or bad conditions will be no excuse in Labour's 'New Britain'.

GREEN SOLUTIONS

A **BASIC INCOME SCHEME** is central to Green Party economic and social policy. It is an automatic payment to **every** man, woman and child sufficient to cover the basic needs of food, fuel, and shelter. It would work very much like child benefit except everyone would receive it. This payment would be unaffected by income and would replace all Social Security benefits and tax allowances. It would effectively remove the 'poverty trap' by providing security ***and*** an incentive to work. It would ensure greater rewards for those who do necessary but unpleasant jobs, and make all sorts of desirable (but low paid or voluntary) work more viable.

L.E.T.S. Basic income would complement the rapid growth of the UK's 400+ Local Exchange Trading Systems, whose co-operative economic approach enables people to tackle poverty and increase local wealth, creativity and community - areas in which the present system clearly fails. To join a scheme you simply prepare a list of what you want and can offer for the local directory. Trades are paid for by writing a LETS 'cheque' which transfers credits from one member's account to another. As a non-profit scheme, no interest is payable on positive or negative balances. Open accounts are included with each directory to ensure accountability and enable informed trading decisions. At present LETS is a 'complementary economy' but when food and shelter become available will offer a real green alternative.

PERMACULTURE: You can grow enough organic fruit and veg to support yourself on a 1/3 of a football pitch. See: "Forest Garden" by Robert Hart, ISI, 20 Heber Rd, London NW2 6AA. 325p
WHAT TO DO? Get in contact with the Green Party, put this leaflet in Post Offices, Job Centres and public places, turn up with others at nasty corporations 'seeking work', join/start a LETS scheme and/or organic food co-op, talk to people about the JSA's effect on crime, support ES staff strikes and remember, interviewees with a healthy interest in trade unions and environmental practices rarely get the job.

More Info: Green Party Basic Income Guide: £1 in stamps Greentrade, 43 Green St, Hereford HR1 2QH
LETS Starter Pack/Local Scheme: LETSLink UK, 61 Woodcock Road, Warminster, Hants BA12 9DH
More of these leaflets: 6 x1st class stamps per 100, Greentrade, 43 Green St, Hereford HR1 2QH
For local JSA group: Oxford Claiments Union, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes St, OX4 1HU.

The Green Party, 1a Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ 0171 272 4474 £8/19 join us.

Stop Press: Sat 7th Sept 'Stop the Clampdown, Reclain the Future Parade' Hyde Park, London.